

Hood Canal Coordinating Council Agriculture Survey Responses

What do you need to be successful in agricultural endeavors in Hood Canal with respect to:

- Balance between regulations, incentives, and stewardship?
- Land availability/affordability?
- Market access/price?
- Water quality/quantity?
- Community perception/support?
- Other?

Al Latham, Jefferson County Conservation District in Port Hadlock, WA

Balance between regulations, incentives, and stewardship?

One size fits all regulations do not work for agriculture. Need to be applied site specifically. Regulators are biased towards whatever they are regulating. For instance DFW HPA writers are focused on fish and usually could care less about what a farmer may need to do. Need more understanding of farming needs from regulators.

Financial Incentives are necessary since farmers usually have no control over prices for the products, and can't adjust those prices to cover additional costs of BMP's and habitat improvements.

Land availability/affordability?

This is definitely an issue for people looking for a place to farm. Purchasing conservation easements compensate landowners for part of the value of their property so they can (ideally) sell it for less than market value. Need lots of funding for conservation easements.

Market access/price?

Have always been issues for farmers and will continue to be. That nut is hard to crack!

Water quality/quantity?

Water Quality – Need regulators to understand that the water quality standards in some areas set the bar too high, and will not be met.

Water Quantity – Oh my god.... Water law..... Department of Ecology setting instream flows higher than reality.

Community perception/support?

This is very important. We currently enjoy excellent community support in Jefferson County.

Other?

See www.mindfully.org/Farm/2003/Everything-Is-Illegal1esp03.htm

Ken Van Buskirk, Davis Farms in Belfair, WA

The Mason County Dialogues (Cascade Land Conservancy focus groups) came to consensus on many of these important questions. See summary below and pages 17-22 of the following document:

<http://www.cascadeland.org/the-olympic-agenda/mason-county/Mason%20County%20report%20FINAL.pdf>

Our vision for the next 100 years includes:

Mason County will have public/private partnerships between the agriculture and aquaculture industries and public social service and education facilities to provide local food to residents in the form of school lunches, meals for the elderly, etc. Also, Mason County institutions, such as the correctional facility, will use locally produced food.

Mason County will have strong agriculture and aquaculture industries that are supported by local regulation as well as by funding from state and federal government agencies. Mason County will use partnerships and collaboration with other agencies to achieve mutual goals to benefit these industries. Mason County will have a range of sustainable small farms that comprise a critical mass to support the agriculture industry. This includes farms that are family wage-based. These farms will provide the residents access to locally produced crops, livestock and aquaculture products through Community Supported Agriculture that is encouraged by local programs. Mason County will also have local processing plants to support its agriculture industry, and will encourage agricultural products that are accessible and consumed locally by residents. This includes a variety of agriculture opportunities such as pea patch gardens and permanent, year round farmers' markets.

Mason County will have a greater interest in and incentives for land conservation, and standards and guidelines for these incentives will exist. Specifically, Mason County will use these incentives to encourage keeping key lands in forestry and agriculture uses.

Balance between regulations, incentives, and stewardship?

Regulatory barriers discourage local production and the regulatory structure lacks incentives to encourage farmers to stay in or grow their businesses.

Land availability/affordability?

High real estate value is removing productive lands from working status and converting them to residential and commercial uses. This creates several problems. First, landowners are encouraged by the high real estate value to sell their land for development, decreasing the overall acres in farming or aquaculture and fragmenting existing acres, creating a less viable industry. Second, the real estate value is so high that upcoming generations cannot afford to purchase the lands necessary to enter into the business.

Other?

Environmental variables are affecting our agriculture and aquaculture industries, such as low dissolved oxygen in Hood Canal, poor water quality in the Skokomish watershed and continued degradation of all waterways. In addition, salmon suffer from a tragedy of the commons and lack of "ownership" or a singular responsibility over their management. Differing management methods across landowner types can result in a wide range of habitat quality.

There is a lack of infrastructure to encourage farming, such as processing facilities, farmers' cooperatives and markets for local food. Mason County suffers in part because of the distance to I-5 and access to

markets in the corridor. Maintaining a critical mass of acres in agriculture will make the industry more viable.

The resource land-to-urban interface negatively affects both farm and aquaculture land. Complaints from neighbors regarding smells, noises or methods can lead to farm closures or sales. This can encourage farmland fragmentation and reduce the viability of the industry. Additionally, pressure from neighbors can include trespassing, problems with pets etc. The public tends to perceive private lands as being available for public uses, and trespassing can lead to liability and additional costs. There are many groups discussing issues surrounding Mason County waterways, however there is no venue to engage in consensus dialogue to develop solutions.

What can we do about it?

Mason County needs to work cooperatively to develop programs that incentivize the agriculture and aquaculture industries. This includes developing cooperatives for value-added processing and marketing, incentives for large landowners not to fragment (including incentives for conservation) incentives for 5- 10 acre landowners to unite into viable farming situations, encouragement for the business of farming to pass through generations, incentives for small landowners to participate in agriculture and habitat conservation, and generally expanding the funding and political support that promotes these incentives.

There should be a coordinated regulatory and incentive program that is comprehensive and includes market-based solutions. These programs should include funding and support for conservation buyers of agriculture or aquaculture lands, especially in critical areas.

New development in Mason County should be thoughtfully planned, in order to utilize a smaller footprint to prevent sprawl and reduce the urban / resource land interface. Public / private partnerships should be encouraged in order to achieve well-planned development. Mason County should utilize innovative new strategies for growth management including The Cascade Agenda's Conservation Villages. These new strategies could include green development, serpentine landscaping and other new technologies for reducing impact on water systems. Mason County needs to get past the land use conflict between resource lands and recreation lands by designating aquaculture lands and recreation lands. A system could be considered to revolve recreational harvest areas and protection areas to give recreational beds a rest from harvest.

Mason County needs to foster place-based conversations to encourage local solutions, and a local pride in the cultural heritage of working on the waterways and on resource lands. Above all, these strategies should protect Mason County's rural life style.

Partnerships between public agencies and educational facilities should utilize students for data-gathering and monitoring on a consistent basis in order to provide annual data over time.

Mason County should capture opportunities to invest public dollars in restoration in rural areas.

Mason County could encourage, incentivize, and facilitate local and small businesses to bid on government contracts in order to stimulate the local economy.

Kate Dean, Jefferson Landworks Collaborative in Chimacum, WA

What do you need to be successful in agricultural endeavors in Hood Canal with respect to:

Balance between regulations, incentives, and stewardship?

In order for producers to be successful, they must be shown the benefit of compliance with regulation. This can be achieved through continuing to fund programs that support and promote programs that “incentive-ize” funding and cost share for BMPs and other similar programs, including environmental services, CREP, carbon sales, system upgrades, etc. Agencies need to play the role of assisting landowners and linking them to resources that will help them achieve their goals. An example of this would be the difference between saying to a farmer, “You can’t irrigate out the creek unless you put a screen on your pump intake” versus, “Hey, this new cost share program just started that will pay for half of the screen for your pump intake. I can help you with the paperwork since it is kind of difficult.” Extension and Conservation Districts are vital for providing technical assistance for conservation in a non-political forum.

Land availability/affordability?

Access to land is often cited as a major barrier for farmers here, though there is a lot of underutilized land. More accurately, there is a shortage of land with improvements and infrastructure to support agriculture, making lease arrangements difficult to navigate (who pays for fencing? A new well?)

Most of the region’s farmland will change hands in the next 20 years. There is speculative value in much of this land, making it unaffordable to most farmers. Placing conservation easements on prime farmland is one tool that can maintain affordability and counties and the state should continue to fund programs that purchase development rights.

Where strong demand and markets exist for local farm products, farmers can justify the expense of high cost farmland (eg: east King County). Strengthening the economic viability of farming will allow farmers to purchase prime farmland, to create jobs and demand for related services, etc.

Market access/price?

This region has done well in developing markets for small farms. But there have been very few operations that have capitalized to be able to operate efficiently and at a larger scale. Therefore the price of locally grown goods has remained high and unobtainable to many. Economic development initiatives need to support the building of infrastructure that can be shared by food and farm businesses- helping to provide capital for upgrades and efficiencies. Leveraging investment will also allow necessary capitalization, though farmers tend to be averse to debt.

Water quality/quantity?

Similar to the first bullet, I think that landowners need non-political technical assistance in navigating the water rights labyrinth. There is a current effort to change legislation to allow for more local control of water use, and I think this is essential to address modern ag water needs. Major changes to the disincentive of conservation in water law are necessary.

Community perception/support?

Agriculture in this region is changing. The old model no longer works here, and the “new” ag is still undeveloped. There is a necessary evolution that landowners need help to embrace; regulation is here to stay, and bureaucrats need to embrace their role as guides. Consumers need to rethink their food choices (and need to be educated to do so) and farmers must embrace efficiencies so that they produce affordable goods. Environmental efforts need to embrace the benefit and value that agriculture brings to rural communities and reduce limitations on properties with prime soils.